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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6450

ALLISON BINNEY, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
DAVID A. MULLON JR., MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

March 27, 2008

Dear Tribal Leader,

I am writing to seek your input on the current Indian health care system. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, improving the Indian health care system is one of my top priorities. During a recent hearing regarding the confirmation of Robert McSwain to be Director of the Indian Health Service, it was clear that there are significant problems in the overall functioning of the current system. With your help, I hope to make great improvements in the system during my Chairmanship.

As a part of this effort, I am working very hard to secure reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. In early 2007, I introduced the *Indian Health Care Improvement Act Amendments* (S. 1200), which was recently passed by the Senate in a resounding 83-10 vote. This bill both improves existing Indian health programs and authorizes vital new programs. The bill is now pending before the House of Representatives, and I will work with my colleagues in the House to get a bill to the President as soon as possible.

However, as you know, that bill is only a part of the solution to the problems faced by the current Indian health care system. More needs to be done.

In response to complaints and comments by tribal leaders, individual Indians and health care providers, I plan to hold a hearing soon on the Contract Health Services program. This program allows Indian health clinics and hospitals to obtain services from outside contractors when the clinics and hospitals cannot provide these services. However, the program is not working well, and many individual Indians are often faced with having to pay enormous bills that are supposed to be covered by the federal government.

In preparation for this hearing, I would greatly appreciate any input or comments you or your members can provide. Thoughts about how the current

Contract Health Services program is working and any problems that your community faces regarding health care will be beneficial.

Please send your suggestions to me by either:

- Fax: (202) 228-2589;
- Email: [comments@indian.senate.gov](mailto:comments@indian.senate.gov); or
- In writing:

Senator Byron L. Dorgan  
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
838 Senate Hart Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

I look forward to working with you to bring about meaningful reform in the area of Indian health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Byron L. Dorgan", with a stylized, flowing script.

BYRON L. DORGAN